



ACS 2012 WINNING CHEESE PLATE

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- ★ [Cremont](#), Vermont Butter & Cheese Creamery
- ★ [GranQueso Reserve](#), Emmi Roth USA
- ★ [Truffle Tremor](#), Cypress Grove Chevre
- ★ [Grand Cru Surchoix](#), Emmi Roth USA
- ★ [Hopelessly Bleu](#), Pure Luck Farm & Dairy

When asked to come up with my ideal American cheese plate, my thoughts went directly to the ACS Judging & Competition. After helping out on the Judging & Competition Committee for the last few years, this year I sat in the audience to hear the winners announced with the crowd. The awards are a labor of love for those who work the event, in honor of the labor of love American cheese makers put into their products. It made me giddy every time I heard the name of a favorite announced, and picking just a handful for this plate was a tough assignment. I love American cheeses. I love the fact that our cheese making community is a microcosm of our larger culture, with roots in the old worlds, all tangled up together, sprouting wonderful new growth at every turn. ACS is a celebration of all our wonderful homegrown cheesemakers, so I thought it would be fun and fitting to offer pairings with bubbly.

I've followed the basics here with a mixture of milks, textures, and ages. In a guided tasting, I like to mix it up and alternate between soft and hard, going from mildest to strongest. But I'm a realist and know that at a party, everybody just kind of digs in - so I've tried to make versatile selections in hopes that there won't be any clunkers for non-precise revelers. Sparkling wines are a great pairing for cheese in general, because they don't have much in the way of tannins to clash with the salt in cheese. Plus the effervescence nicely contrasts with creamy textures, helping to clear the palate for the next bite.

★ CREMONT, VERMONT BUTTER & CHEESE CREAMERY (VT)

Cremont, Vermont Butter & Cheese Creamery's double-cream mixed milk (cow and goat) disc, is silky smooth with a delicate geotrichum rind. There's a hint of nuttiness in the cheese which is accentuated by the almond notes in the wine. *Cremant d'Alcace* usually has some apricot-like flavors which complement the Cremont perfectly.

★ GRANQUESO RESERVE, EMMI ROTH USA (WI)

I like GranQueso both young and old, but keep an eye out for the rare Reserve, aged a minimum of 9 months, for a stronger flavor profile and firmer texture. GranQueso is a cow's milk American Original that taps into the Wisconsin terroir. The rind is rubbed with a combination of cinnamon, nutmeg and paprika that lends a warm spice background to the paste. While it's folly to generalize, I find *Cavas* reflect their own land - the dusty Catalonia - with earthy and apple notes that meld well with the underlying spiciness of GranQueso.



★ TRUFFLE TREMOR, CYPRESS GROVE CHEVRE (CA)

Take the classic combination of a creamy bloomy-rinded cheese and a fine Champagne, up the complexity by using goat's milk, add truffles, and prepare for lift off. Cypress Grove Chevre is celebrating the 20th anniversary of the beloved Humboldt Fog this year, and its little brother, Truffle Tremor, is ready to party in style. *Brut Champagnes* are creamy, toasty, and delicate. The velvety soft-ripened Truffle Tremor is dotted with Italian summer truffles which make it both earthy and sophisticated. This elegant combination will dance on your tongue and finish with a beautiful flourish.

★ GRAND CRU SURCHOIX, EMMI ROTH USA (WI)

My friend Kristin turned me on to Eric Bordelet's fine sparkling ciders, which I categorize as closer to sparkling wine than other ciders, which are closer to beer. His *Poire Authentique* is off dry with good acidity and a long finish. It is a knock-out with cheese in general, but ethereal with the Grand Cru Surchoix. This Gruyere-style cheese is hand crafted in small batches in copper vats and aged on natural Spruce boards for a minimum of 9 months. It is remarkably complex, with very low acidity, and the caramel, toasted nut and mushroom flavors are like a warm blanket by a toasty fire.

★ HOPELESSLY BLEU, PURE LUCK FARM & DAIRY (TX)

I'm lucky enough to live in Austin, Texas, just down the road from Pure Luck. There, Amelia Sweethardt makes Hopelessly Bleu, a bloomy rinded goat's milk blue that's perfectly oozy at the edges and firm and chalky in the middle. *Brachetto*, a light bodied red sparkler from Italy, is slightly sweet with hints of strawberry. The pair presents the pleasing contrasts of a SweetTart - a juxtaposition of flavors and textures that's flat-out a lot of fun.

About the American Cheese Society (ACS): ACS is the leading organization supporting the understanding, appreciation, and promotion of farmstead, artisan and specialty cheeses produced in the Americas. At 1,500 members strong, ACS provides advocacy, education, business development, and networking opportunities for cheesemakers, retailers, enthusiasts, and extended industry. ACS strives to continually raise the quality and availability of cheese in the Americas.

Since its founding in 1983, ACS proudly hosts the foremost annual educational conference and world-renowned annual cheese judging and competition. The 2013 ACS Conference & Competition will be held in Madison, WI from July 31-August 3, 2013. For more information, visit www.cheesesociety.org.